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PLEKHANOV, LENIN AND WORKING-CLASS
CONSCIOUSNESS

ABSTRACT. According to the prevailing scholarly view, made popular by Neil Harding, Lenin is said to have derived his well-known theory of working-class consciousness in *What Is To Be Done?* from G. V. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism. In this article I demonstrate, however, that Plekhanov and Lenin disagreed quite sharply on this question. Plekhanov did not believe that workers would fail to develop a socialist consciousness in the absence of external intervention. Indeed, Plekhanov was a thorough-going optimist about proletarian capacities, and while he did assign an important role to the intelligentsia in the process of consciousness-raising, that role was carefully circumscribed. An exhaustive review of Plekhanov's writings before November 1903, when he broke with Lenin, reveals just how unorthodox Lenin's most famous argument was in the context of Russian Social-Democratic theory.

KEY WORDS: Lenin, Plekhanov, Bakunin, Neil Harding, Marxism

Of all of Lenin's arguments, none is more well known than his discussion of spontaneity and consciousness in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902). In the second chapter of that pamphlet Lenin claimed that workers were not spontaneously socialist in their inclinations but spontaneously bourgeois. If left to themselves, proletarians engaged only in a trade-union struggle for higher wages and better working conditions but did not press for a revolutionary transformation of the capitalist system itself. Marx had demonstrated, however, that socialism was in the objective interests of the working class, and Lenin therefore concluded that if the proletariat was ever to realize its class interest the socialist idea would have to be brought to it "from without" by those who understood Marx's science – the radical bourgeois intelligentsia. Because there was no internal dynamic within the working class that might drive it in a socialist direction, an enlightened external agent was needed to initiate the revolutionary transformation of proletarian consciousness.¹

This is a striking argument with obvious authoritarian implications, and scholars have therefore been concerned to investigate its origins and its consistency with turn-of-the-century Russian Social-

Democratic thought. An earlier generation of commentators often claimed that Lenin's theses were unorthodox,² but the scholarly consensus has changed markedly in the past two decades. Nearly every commentator who has discussed the question in recent years has argued that Lenin's doctrine was consistent with the prevailing views of his Russian Social-Democratic comrades. Indeed, most scholars now claim that Lenin derived his argument from the "father of Russian Marxism," G. V. Plekhanov. Long before Lenin published his famous pamphlet Plekhanov is said to have articulated similarly pessimistic views about working-class capacities, and this would suggest that Lenin's authoritarianism was deeply rooted in the Russian Social-Democratic tradition. According to this interpretation, Lenin did not introduce alien views into Russian Social-Democratic theory but merely drew on those ideas that lay ready to hand.

Although this argument about the Plekhanovist origins of Lenin's pessimism was first set forth by Samuel Baron in 1963,³ recent commentators have been much more influenced by the case presented by Neil Harding in the first volume of *Lenin's Political Thought*. According to Harding, Plekhanov had "a positively instrumental view of the working class. Often in his writings the proletariat was conceived of as but the chosen instrument of intelligentsia designs; its historical role was to help and assist the intelligentsia."

The workers, Plekhanov insisted, did not and could not know the full nature of their position and their objectives within society. There was, in his view, a lag of working-class consciousness behind the development of the objective conditions within society. Only the determined activity of the "revolutionary bacilli" . . . could overcome the lag of consciousness.⁴

Like Lenin, Plekhanov is said to have denied that the proletariat was spontaneously socialist; like Lenin, he apparently believed that consciousness had to be brought from without into the workers' midst. Harding therefore insisted that we "accept *What Is To Be Done?* for what it represented at the time – a restatement of the principles of Russian Marxist orthodoxy."⁵

Harding's argument itself has become a kind of orthodoxy in the scholarly literature on Lenin.⁶ Even critics of his work tend to accept this interpretation of Plekhanov. Alfred Meyer, for instance, sharply criticized Harding's work in a review but conceded that "Harding convincingly brings out the peculiar features of Russian

Marxist orthodoxy and shows Plekhanov as a genuine pioneer of Leninism.”⁷

In this paper, however, I contest Harding’s influential interpretation. Lenin’s argument about working-class consciousness in *What Is To Be Done?* was *not* consistent with the orthodoxy of the Russian Social Democrats. Plekhanov was indeed the chief spokesperson of that orthodoxy, but he did *not* believe that workers would fail to develop a socialist consciousness in the absence of external intervention. Plekhanov was a thorough-going optimist about proletarian capacities, and while he did assign an important role to the intelligentsia in the process of consciousness-raising, that role was carefully circumscribed. An exhaustive review of Plekhanov’s writings before November 1903, when he broke with Lenin, will reveal just how unorthodox Lenin’s most famous argument was in the context of Russian Social-Democratic theory.

This paper contrasts the views of Plekhanov and Lenin on the problem of spontaneity and consciousness. Its aim is not only to set the record straight on this important issue and restore Plekhanov’s reputation but also to highlight the democratic character of Russian Marxism, a feature of this body of thought that has been neglected in recent discussions. Despite what is commonly said, Russian Social Democracy was in fact the most democratic brand of Social-Democratic theory in Europe at the turn of the century, certainly more democratic than its German counterpart. Failure to recognize this obscures the distinctiveness of Leninism, which emerged as a novel form of Marxism after 1900 only by abandoning crucial elements of Plekhanov’s more democratic theory.

THE POPULIST ORIGINS 1873–1879

Plekhanov began to work out the fundamental elements of Russian Social-Democratic theory in the early 1880s, after a period of intense study of the writings of Marx and Engels. Yet the principal source of his doctrine regarding the capacities of the working class and the intelligentsia’s role in the workers’ movement was not Marxist theory itself, I believe, but the Russian Populist ideology in which he had been steeped as a youth.⁸ Plekhanov began his revolutionary career as a Populist of the Bakuninist school, and the Russian

Social-Democratic orthodoxy he came to articulate bore the traces of Populist ideology. That ideology, as we shall see, was quite optimistic about the abilities of the common laborer and assigned but a subsidiary role to the intelligentsia.

The views of the Russian Populists on the question of revolutionary consciousness were heavily influenced by Mikhail Bakunin's final work, *Statism and Anarchy* (1873).⁹ A long, rambling and often tedious analysis of Great Power conflicts in Europe and the prospect for social revolution, *Statism and Anarchy* is best known for its hostile references to Marx's socialism. The Russian revolutionary youth, however, were attracted much more by Bakunin's advice about how to further the cause of revolution in Russia, advice contained in a special appendix to that work. Bakunin warned the student youth that "no scholar is in a position to teach the people . . . how the people will and must live on the day after the social revolution."

What we call the people's ideal has nothing in common with those political and social schemes, formulas and theories developed in isolation from popular life by bourgeois scholars . . . at their leisure, and graciously offered to the ignorant crowd as the necessary form of its future system.¹⁰

Bakunin was opposed to attempts to bring socialist ideas to the masses from without, in part because he believed that such attempts would fail to win over converts and in part because he suspected that such attempts revealed an authoritarian impulse to shape others to one's liking. Bakunin claimed that if a socialist ideal "had not developed in the consciousness of the people, at least in its basic features, one would have to give up all hope for a Russian revolution." Such an ideal could only be "advanced from the very depths of popular life," as "a result of popular historical experience, its aspirations, sufferings, protests and struggle."¹¹ Socialism had to come from within those who were to enact it or it would not come at all.

Fortunately for the Russian socialist, Bakunin argued, socialist aspirations were already present within the Russian masses, and thus there was no need to import such ideals from without. He assured his readers that

we have neither the desire nor the least intention to impose on our own or another people any kind of social organization drawn from books or invented by us, for we are convinced that the popular masses carry in their more or less historically

developed instincts, in their urgent needs and conscious and unconscious aspirations, all of the elements of their future organization. We find this ideal in the people itself.¹²

Following Herzen and others, Bakunin claimed that the Russian peasant was already an instinctive socialist. That instinct had been engendered “not by means of book learning but by the natural accumulation of experience and thought” within the rural commune, with its ancient system of collective ownership. Practice had already created the subjective precondition for socialist transformation. Thus, Bakunin taught, revolutionaries could find in Russia “instinctive aspirations that would correspond to [their] social-revolutionary ideal.” What the *intelligent* should bring to the peasant was “nothing other than a clear, complete and logical expression of his own instinct, so that in essence you have not given him anything, you have not brought him anything new, but only clarified to him what existed within him long before he met you.”¹³

This understanding of the function of the revolutionary *intelligent* is clearly quite different from the theory set forth in *What Is To Be Done?*. Bakunin was insistent that socialist aspirations were an indigenous product of the working masses, the inevitable consequence of their own experience and struggle. Revolutionaries did not have to bring socialist consciousness into the masses but merely articulated what working people intuitively felt.

Although revolutionary theories abounded in Russia during the 1870s, Bakunin’s teaching best suited the radical climate of the day and decisively influenced the program of *Zemlia i Volia* (Land and Liberty), the Populist organization in which Plekhanov began his revolutionary career.¹⁴ As Plekhanov’s comrade P. B. Akselrod later observed, the *Zemlia i Volia* Populists

refused to propagate socialist theories borrowed from the West and . . . adapted all revolutionary activity to the views and customs of our people already deeply rooted in them as a result of a long historical process. The sole criterion for evaluating the revolutionary significance of a proposed activity within the people was the complete correspondence of this activity with the people’s historically developed ideals and opinions.¹⁵

The aim of these self-styled Populists was not to bring revolution from without but to develop it from within, drawing on that which was already implicit in the people and making it explicit. The task

of *Zemlia i Volia* was only to convince the people to be in practice what they were already thought to be in spirit.

Although many examples of this Bakuninist doctrine could be cited in the publications of *Zemlia i Volia*, the single best expression of the Populist view was contained in the programmatic article of the organization's journal, published in October 1878. Written by Sergei Kravčinskii, a close friend of both Bakunin and Plekhanov,¹⁶ its formulations continued to guide the revolutionary intelligentsia long after *Zemlia i Volia* had disintegrated. Speaking for the new generation of "socialist-populists," the article declared that "only those cultural forms have a future that are rooted in the minds and the aspirations of the popular masses. We do not believe that it is possible to create by means of preliminary work ideals different from those developed by the people's entire previous history."¹⁷ If socialist instincts were not already present in the Russian masses it would be fruitless to preach socialism to them. "The foundation of every genuinely revolutionary program must be the popular ideals created by history in a given time and place." The task of the revolutionary intelligentsia was simply "to develop the future socialist system from those elementary foundations of socialism that have already been created in the minds of the people."¹⁸

Of course to achieve this goal a revolution was needed, but Kravčinskii cautioned that the Populists themselves could not "make" this revolution:

Revolutions are the affairs of the popular masses. History prepares them. Revolutionaries do not have the power to adjust anything. They can only be the instruments of history, expressing popular aspirations. Their role consists only in organizing the people in the name of its aspirations and demands and in elevating it to the struggle for their realization – to assist in the acceleration [*sodeistvovat' uskoreniiu*] of that revolutionary process that is occurring in the present period in accordance with the inviolable laws of nature. Outside that role they are nothing; within its bounds they are one of the most powerful factors in history.¹⁹

Here was the basic theory of the revolutionary Populists. They did not try to bring socialism from without but merely accelerated a revolutionary process already underway. Socialist revolution would occur even without their assistance, but the intelligentsia could perform a valuable service by hastening the process.

This doctrine was quite different from the pessimistic view espoused by Lenin in 1902. The Bakuninists and the Populists would

have disagreed sharply with Lenin's assertion that workers could not arrive at socialist consciousness through their own efforts and that socialism therefore had to be brought to them from without by the bourgeois intelligentsia. Lenin's whole approach reeked of the doctrinaire socialism about which Bakunin (and Marx) had warned repeatedly. As Lev Tikhomirov explained in the final issue of *Zemlia i volia*, the Populist was convinced "that in the already existing popular worldview is to be found all the elements needed for a very tolerable social system, and therefore our whole task amounts only to realizing it – that is, we simply join the centuries-old popular struggle and try to secure for it a successful outcome"²⁰

Within a few years Russian Populism splintered into different factions. Some, like Tikhomirov, became increasingly pessimistic about the abilities of the people and abandoned Populism for terrorism. Plekhanov, on the contrary, remained true to the Populist philosophy of revolutionary action even after he became a Social Democrat.

PLEKHANOV'S ORTHODOXY 1879–1899

Plekhanov himself frequently pointed out the similarity between orthodox Populism and Russian Social Democracy in later years. In a 1906 essay he observed that

as regards theory a Social Democrat has nothing in common with a Populist, but as regards practical activity the Social Democrat is in general not so far from the Populist as might seem during the heat of argument. There is one general feature that establishes a close link between them. Both tie all chances of success to the self-activity of the masses; both are firmly convinced that their own work makes sense only if it awakens the masses. In this regard the Populist has much more in common with the Social Democrat than, for example, with the *narodovolets*. And this has been too little noted up to now.²¹

According to Plekhanov, the crucial point of similarity between Populism and Marxism was the conviction that the masses themselves must make their own revolution. The intelligentsia could aid that process and help it to occur more quickly, but they must not push the masses aside or try to replace them.

It was precisely this commitment to popular self-activity that led Plekhanov to break with the majority of *Zemlia i Volia* in 1879 as the latter turned from agitation among the working people to

the terrorist struggle against the autocracy.²² Plekhanov was not opposed to political assassination in principle, but he believed that increasing reliance on it as a method of struggle took resources away from attempts to rouse the masses to action and betrayed a disturbing pessimism about the capacity of the people to make their own revolution. After all, the average laborer could not participate in a conspiratorial campaign of terror or the *coup d'état* in which it was supposed to culminate. Speaking of the disputes that divided *Zemlia i Volia*, Plekhanov later explained that

This history of these disagreements is usually depicted as if the populists of the old school stood for peaceful activity while the terrorists wanted revolution. In fact the argument was about whether to continue the revolutionary or insurrectionary attempts within the people or to give up on them and limit revolutionary action to the struggle of the intelligentsia against the government.²³

From beginning to end of his career, and with hardly any exception, faith in the ability of the common people was the guiding principle of Plekhanov's philosophy.

After *Zemlia i Volia* broke apart in 1879, Plekhanov and a few others formed an agitational group called *Chernyi Peredel* (Black Repartition) that carried on the traditions of orthodox Populism. This organization, however, failed to attract many adherents and quickly withered in the oppressive conditions occasioned by the terrorist struggle of *Narodnaia Volia* (The Popular Will) against the autocracy. Forced into exile in 1880, Plekhanov and his comrades began to study and to translate the classic texts of Marxist theory over the next several years and soon exchanged their Populist views for Social-Democratic Marxism.²⁴ As I have indicted, however, the transformation from Populism to Marxism was not as great as might be imagined. While abandoning many Populist principles, the founders of the Group for the Emancipation of Labor (GEL) continued to adhere to the core principle of popular self-activity and the Populist understanding of the role of the *intelligent* in the revolutionary movement. As Andrzej Walicki notes, "one might even say that Plekhanov became a Social Democrat because he wanted to remain true to the old 'Land and Liberty' program, which proclaimed that 'Revolutions are made by the masses and prepared by history.'"²⁵

Indeed, the continuity between the two movements is apparent in the charter work of Russian Social Democracy, Plekhanov's *Social-*

ism and the Political Struggle, published in 1883. In the preface to that work Plekhanov recognized that some might criticize GEL for having abandoned Populism, but he insisted that “the desire to work within the people and for the people, the certainty that ‘the emancipation of the working class must be the affair of the working class itself’ – the practical tendency of our Populism is as dear to me as before.”²⁶ And this democratic commitment fundamentally shaped his understanding of the way the proletariat was supposed to come to class consciousness. To be sure, when Plekhanov went over to Marxism he abandoned his former conviction about the instinctual socialist tendencies of the Russian peasant. Whereas before he had emphasized the resilience of the rural commune, now he saw it as torn by class conflict and bound to dissolve as capitalist agriculture developed. In general Plekhanov became extremely pessimistic about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. But none of this diminished Plekhanov’s faith in the abilities of the urban working class, a faith nourished by several years of direct agitation in workers’ circles in the late 1870s. As a Marxist Plekhanov of course did not see the proletariat as socialist from birth, but he did believe that the class would eventually become socialist, even if left to its own devices.

This point is made in a long passage in the second part of *Socialism and the Political Struggle*, on the process by which workers come to revolutionary consciousness. Reminiscent of Marx’s discussion in the *Communist Manifesto*, Plekhanov argued that “only gradually does the oppressed class become clear about the connection between its economic position and its political role in the state. For a long time it does not understand even its economic task to the full.” But eventually workers begin to organize in order to improve their economic situation. “Little by little the process of generalization does its work . . . and the oppressed begin to be conscious of themselves as a class.” At this stage, however, the proletarians are still reformist but not yet revolutionary or socialist. “For a long time they fight only for concessions” Plakhanov observed.

Only in the next and last stage of development does the oppressed class come to a thorough realization of its position . . . It does not appeal for the curbing of its exploiters to those who constitute the political organ of that exploitation. It knows that the state is a fortress serving as the bulwark and defense of its oppressors, a fortress which the oppressed can and must capture and reorganize.

Nowhere in this passage does Plekhanov mention the intelligentsia, let alone suggest that the proletariat is dependent on it to attain socialist consciousness. Practice itself is shown to lead the class beyond the economic struggle to socialist revolution. And far from maintaining that by themselves workers fixate at the level of trade-union consciousness, Plekhanov claimed that “only by going through the hard school of the struggle for separate little pieces of enemy territory does the oppressed class acquire the persistence, the courage and the development necessary for the decisive battle.” Though wary of “economism,” Plekhanov did not see it as the inevitable tendency of proletarian class struggle.²⁷

Later in this section Plekhanov posed the question of whether simple workers could “understand ‘abstract’ questions of social economics and socialism, if not better than, then at least as well as, people who have spent decades on their education.” He answered that in fact “these people know Ricardo never having even seen the cover of his works.” Daily experience of capitalist production made it easy for workers to grasp the Marxist critique, he claimed, for they lived what Marx had described. “Modern scientific socialism” was not “the invention of some leisurely benefactor of humanity” but was “a generalization from those very phenomena which we all come across . . . in our daily life.”²⁸ The theory summarizes and explains the worker’s experience, it does not contradict it.

To be sure, Plekhanov did assign an important role to the socialist intelligentsia in the process of consciousness-raising. In the third section of the pamphlet he declared that “as long as the working class has still not developed to the point of being able to resolve its great historical task, the duty of its supporters is to accelerate [*usko-renie*] the process of its development, to remove the obstacles that prevent the growth of its strength and consciousness.”²⁹ As should be apparent, this statement is consistent with the orthodox Populist teaching – even borrowing its terminology – and does not imply an inability on the part of workers to achieve socialist consciousness by their own efforts. In the absence of intervention by the intelligentsia the process of radicalization would take longer to unfold, but it would not come to a halt altogether since capitalism itself “creates both the objective and the subjective possibility for emancipating the laborers.”³⁰

In this and other works Plekhanov repeatedly argued that it was the responsibility of the socialist intelligentsia to “create” or “train” the “elements for the formation of the future workers’ socialist party in Russia.” The intelligentsia “must become the leader of the working class in the forthcoming emancipation movement, clarify for it its political and economic interests . . . and prepare it for an independent role in the social life of Russia.”³¹ Without external help the small and undeveloped working class in Russia would take decades to mature. The intelligentsia could hasten this process and prepare the class to act on its own by bringing knowledge and organizational skills to it. But Plekhanov also recognized that the intelligentsia could do much harm. The Populists (including Plekhanov himself) had hindered the maturation of the workers in the 1870s by condemning political struggle and encouraging them to remain at the stage of economic “guerrilla warfare.” When the Northern Union of Russian Workers included political demands in its program, Plekhanov noted, the Populist *intelligenty* had “recommended that the workers carry on the struggle on economic ground.” In this instance it was the educated outsiders who preached a kind of “economism.” Fortunately, Plekhanov observed, “our workers’ movement very soon outgrew this first phase of its development” and went over of its own accord to political struggle.³² In a later work about *Russian Workers in the Revolutionary Movement* (1891) Plekhanov gleefully proclaimed that “future historians of the revolutionary movement in Russia should note this fact, that in the Seventies demands for political freedom appeared in the workers’ programs earlier than in the programs of the revolutionary intelligentsia.” The Northern Union, he noted, had “a Social-Democratic tinge” several years before he and his comrades went over to the Marxist standpoint.³³ Indeed, it was the workers’ example that helped to make Plekhanov a Social Democrat.³⁴ By no means was Plekhanov pessimistic about working-class capacities.

This understanding of what the intelligentsia could and could not do for the workers is also to be found in *Our Differences* (1885), Plekhanov’s long polemic against the remnants of *Narodnaia Volia*. Quoting Marx’s “Preface” to *Capital* on “shortening and lessening the birthpangs,” Plekhanov declared that “this ‘shortening and lessening the birthpangs’ constitutes . . . one of the most important tasks

of the socialists.” Like midwives the revolutionaries could facilitate a process already underway, but they did not have the power to alter the fundamental “laws of history.”³⁵ An advocate of dialectical thinking, Plekhanov believed that there was an internal dynamic driving capitalist society toward socialism. He therefore spurned the approach of those who “appeal to some other, outside force that would be able to make up for the inadequate inner self-activity in that society and reform it, if not against the will of its members, then at any rate without their active and conscious participation.”³⁶ If revolution was to occur, the catalyst would have to come from within the working class, not from without. Plekhanov scoffed at those who, “in appealing to our intelligentsia . . . expected social miracles from its activity and presumed that its devotion would be a substitute for popular initiative, that its revolutionary energy would replace the inner striving of Russian social life towards a socialist revolution.”³⁷ He flatly denied that the intelligentsia could “play the role of a benevolent providence . . . upon whose will it depended whether the wheel of history would turn one way or another.” The will was no substitute for an internal dynamic; at best it could only accelerate the rate of change of that which was already occurring. As he explained, “the emancipation of a given class can be its own affair only when there is within it an independent emancipation movement.”³⁸

It is in this light that we should interpret the most commonly cited line from *Our Differences*, Plekhanov’s claim that the Social Democrat “will bring consciousness into the working class, without which it is impossible to begin a serious struggle against capitalism.”³⁹ Read in the context of his other statements this does not mean that workers cannot come to consciousness on their own; it means that workers cannot struggle for socialism without consciousness, which the intelligentsia helps to develop. Plekhanov’s point was that “the more or less early victory of the working class depends, among other things, on the influence on that class of those people who understand the meaning of historical development.”⁴⁰ The victory itself was assured, but it could be hastened by concerted effort now.

Perhaps the best evidence for the contention that Plekhanov anticipated Lenin’s claims in 1902 is to be found in the first draft program of GEL (1883), which declares that “not only the success but even the very possibility of such a purposeful movement of the Russian

working class depends to a great extent on the work . . . of the intelligentsia in its midst.”⁴¹ According to Jay Bergman, “one only had to read the Group’s program . . . to see that its authors openly acknowledged what Lenin later claimed in *What Is To Be Done?* – namely, that without the intervention of Marxist revolutionaries, workers could not advance beyond ‘trade-union consciousness’ and perceive the advantages of socialism.”⁴² This is an overstatement, for the language of the first draft is qualified, but more important is the fact that all reference to the role of the intelligentsia was purged from the final draft. D. B. Riazanov (an *Iskra* opponent) suggested that this change resulted from the Group’s “disappointment at the failure of the revolutionary intelligentsia to come over at this time to the point of view of scientific socialism.”⁴³ The Group apparently concluded that the workers would have to – and could – develop on their own, and they therefore deleted all reference to the intelligentsia.

This interpretation is strengthened when we examine Plekhanov’s other writings published at the end of the decade. In an essay entitled “How To Obtain a Constitution” (1888) he urged “our revolutionary youth to assist” the workers’ movement and “awaken the consciousness of the working class.” But he prefaced this appeal with the declaration that

I certainly do not think that the fate of Russia lies in the hands of several hundred or several thousand young people . . . The decomposition of the old economic order is taking place absolutely independently of the influence of the intelligentsia, as is the increase in the numbers of the working class and the gradual maturation of its consciousness.⁴⁴

The proletariat was already beginning to come to consciousness by itself, he claimed. Likewise in *A New Defender of Autocracy* (1889) Plekhanov argued that “by going among the workers, bringing them science, awakening the class consciousness of the proletarians, our revolutionaries from among the ‘intelligentsia’ can become a powerful factor of social development.” But he added that “the absence of allies among the ‘intelligentsia’ will not prevent our working class from becoming conscious of its interests, understanding its tasks, advancing leaders from its own ranks and creating its own workers’ intelligentsia.”⁴⁵ His optimism about working-class capacities could not be more clearly stated.

By now it should be evident that the orthodoxy Plekhanov set forth after his conversion to the Marxist standpoint was sharply at

odds with the pessimistic sentiments to which Lenin gave voice in 1902. Only a tendentious selection of fragments from Plekhanov's writings could turn him into a theoretical precursor of Lenin's theory of working-class consciousness. Plekhanov was optimistic – in retrospect, excessively optimistic – about what the proletariat could achieve by itself. Indeed, the thesis Lenin advanced in 1902 was completely inconsistent with the materialist theory of history Plekhanov spent much of the 1890s defending. Over and over again he argued that the development of consciousness was determined by the development of material relations, although the pace of that development could be affected by the intervention of those who understood in what direction material relations were moving. “The course of ideas lags behind the course of things,” Plekhanov explained in “The Historical Development of the Doctrine of Class Struggle” (1900), but

even within the ranks of one and the same class consciousness does not develop equally quickly: some of its members grasp the essence of the given order of things earlier, others later. This makes it possible for the advanced elements to influence ideologically the backward, and for socialists to influence those proletarians who have not yet gone over to the socialist worldview.⁴⁶

Socialists, however, should not fool themselves that they could implant ideas which the given material relations would not sustain. Plekhanov opposed the voluntarist position of certain latter-day Populists precisely “because it hinders the intelligentsia from assisting the development of [proletarian] consciousness.” It leads them “to oppose the heroes to the crowd and to imagine that the crowd is no more than an aggregate of zeroes, the significance of which depends only on the ideals of the hero who stands at their head.”⁴⁷ Subjectivists overestimate what the intelligentsia can accomplish, and this leads them to dangerous fantasies with authoritarian implications. The workers must emancipate themselves, Plekhanov insisted. All the *intelligent* could do was aid a process that would unfold even if they tried to hinder it.

RESPONDING TO THE “ECONOMISTS” 1900–1902

In his biography of Plekhanov Baron claimed that the founder of Russian Social Democracy became more pessimistic about working-class abilities toward the turn of the century. At this time Plekhanov

became embroiled in the struggle against Eduard Bernstein and the Russian “economists,” and as a result “the role of the intelligentsia in the socialist movement had become magnified in his mind.” Plakhanov’s scepticism about the socialist tendencies of the proletariat is said to have been especially evident in his polemic against the “economists,” *A Vademecum for the Editorial Board of Rabochee Delo* (1900). According to Baron, in this work “Plekhanov went to extremes in overemphasizing the importance of Social-Democratic leadership in the labor movement.”⁴⁸ And Harding concurs: “Plekhanov’s argument [in the *Vademecum*] was the same as the one which Lenin was later to employ so centrally in *What Is To Be Done?*.”⁴⁹

In fact Plekhanov’s views did not change at all. Though his tone was quite sharp in this pamphlet, Plekhanov merely repeated the acceleration thesis he had been defending for fifteen years – a thesis, as we have seen, at odds with Lenin’s pessimism in *What Is To Be Done?*.

Space does not permit a detailed examination of the “economist” controversy that raged within Russian Social Democracy at the turn of the century.⁵⁰ The conflict was sparked in part by personal animosity (and fueled by Plekhanov’s well-known haughtiness), but theoretical issues were also at stake. Those who had the “economist” label pasted on them by the members of GEL accused that organization of artificially pushing the workers into political struggle against the autocracy while neglecting the economic struggle in which the proletariat engaged spontaneously. The “economists” feared that under the guise of “acceleration” the Social-Democratic *intelligentsy* were trying to exploit the Russian proletariat and draw it prematurely into a political struggle that would principally benefit educated radicals eager for a democratic republic. S. N. Prokopovich, for instance, warned against “all attempts to force the natural course of development of the workers’ movement.”⁵¹ If the workers did not recognize the need for political struggle at the present moment, it was not the business of the *intelligentsy* to push them into it. The *intelligent* who had genuine faith in the capacities of the proletariat should allow it to come to consciousness in its own way and to identify its own class interests. The educated outsider was supposed to serve this spontaneous process not attempt to accelerate it, for in Prokopovich’s mind

acceleration was but one step away from imposition. “Economism,” in short, constituted a kind of dare: If the workers *could* become conscious socialists by themselves, why not let them?

Plekhanov’s reply to the “economist” dare is contained in the *Vademecum*. The central weakness of “economism,” he argued, was a failure to recognize that classes did have objective interests of which their members were not always conscious. Plekhanov asked,

Are the workers always aware of their own interests and of their position among the other classes? We, the advocates of the materialist view of history, do not think that this is always so. We do not doubt that the consciousness of people is defined by their social existence. The appearance of new aspects of that existence determines the new content of consciousness. But the determination of consciousness by existence is an entire process, which is accomplished during the course of a more or less prolonged period of time. This is why the workers are for a long time not always aware of their “real interests.”⁵²

As an example Plekhanov noted that some German workers still failed to vote for the Social-Democratic Party although it was in their interest to do so. Given this lag between consciousness and objective reality, it was the function of the intelligentsia – those with superior education – to analyze

the economic . . . and social-political situation of a given country, which determines the economic interests and political tasks of the working class. Having itself become clear about these interests and these tasks, it must immediately proceed to clarify them for the working class. It must try to accelerate this process, so that the content of consciousness is adapted to the form of existence.⁵³

If the “economists” believed that the orthodox had misunderstood the objective state of things and the tasks following from it, they ought to correct the latter’s analysis and identify a new set of objective interests to realize. They had no grounds, however, to reject the role of accelerator unless they no longer wished to be Social Democrats. A revolutionary who refused to “assist this acceleration” and “speak about those interests of which the workers are still not conscious” would merely be “a fifth wheel in the carriage” – in other words, redundant.⁵⁴

Nowhere in this polemic did Plekhanov suggest that workers were incapable of attaining complete consciousness without the external intervention of the bourgeois intelligentsia. Indeed, the whole tendency of his materialist argument contradicted this Leninist thesis

since Plekhanov assumed that existence would eventually alter consciousness anyway. The educated socialist – “whether from the intelligentsia or the workers does not matter”⁵⁵ – merely reduces the amount of time this process would take and helps the backward become more advanced more quickly.

Plekhanov’s reply to the “economists” merely repeated the arguments he had long defended, but Lenin’s contribution to the debate broke new ground. In a set of manuscripts written at about the same time as Plekhanov’s *Vademecum* (late 1899), Lenin decided to agree with the “economists” that the orthodox Social Democrats *were* imposing alien tasks on the working class, but he then argued that without this external influence the workers would fail to emancipate themselves.⁵⁶ Although both Plekhanov and Lenin wanted to defend the intelligentsia against “economist” criticism, their arguments were significantly different.

Elsewhere I have reconstructed in some detail the evolution of Lenin’s argument in *What Is To Be Done?*⁵⁷ Lenin was heavily influenced at this time by an idea he had encountered in Karl Kautsky’s *Das Erfurter Programm* (1892), a highly influential explication of German Social-Democratic theory. In the latter sections of this commentary Kautsky argued that Marx had succeeded in “fusing” the workers’ movement and socialism, but that before him the two had existed separately and had often been at odds.⁵⁸ Lenin turned this idea against the “economists,” arguing that the workers would only become socialists if socialist theory was brought to them from without and fused with their spontaneous economic struggle. The real inspiration for Lenin’s argument in *What Is To Be Done?*, then, was Kautsky’s brand of Social-Democratic theory, which was not entirely consistent with Plekhanov’s more optimistic doctrine.⁵⁹ In this sense Norman Levine is justified in speaking of a “Germanization of Lenin,” an influence especially evident in Lenin’s turn-of-the-century writings.⁶⁰ In any case, Harding is certainly mistaken when he declares that “Lenin’s formulations in polemic with the Economists might well have been sharper but they were hardly innovative.”⁶¹

THE RECORD OF A DISPUTE 1902–1903

Lenin wrote the bulk of *What Is To Be Done?* in great haste in the last two months of 1901. Shortly before the new year he asked Plekhanov and Akselrod to read the first half of the manuscript,⁶² but according to Harding “there is no evidence of any significant contemporary disagreement within the *Iskra* camp on his main themes. ‘Plekhanov and Akselrod merely made minor suggestions in the draft which Lenin adopted.’⁶³

This interpretation is at odds with Plekhanov’s own account of his reaction to Lenin’s manuscript. In an article written after his break with the Bolsheviks, Plekhanov claimed to have recognized Lenin’s deviation at once:

When I read the draft of the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* I immediately told Lenin and other members of our editorial group that I saw in it a great many theoretical errors. Regarding “spontaneity” and “consciousness,” in particular, I pointed out to Lenin that it was – in Hegel’s works – *wie aus der Pistole geschossen*, and I insisted that he revise those passages that seemed incorrect to me.

Not one to back down, not even before the imperious Plekhanov, “Lenin objected that the pamphlet was being issued in his own name and that this lessened considerably the editorial board’s responsibility for it.” Plekhanov was not satisfied with this answer and continued to insist on changes. In the end “Lenin, while defending his position, all the same promised to ‘repair’ the inadequate passages I had indicated to him in his pamphlet.” But according to Plekhanov, “when the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* appeared, it turned out that Lenin had made almost no changes in it.”⁶⁴

Lenin later suggested that Plekhanov’s account was false. In a March 1905 article he declared that “Plekhanov’s assertion that our relations cooled on account of *What Is To Be Done?* is absolutely untrue.”⁶⁵ He claimed that the two had argued at that time about the draft party program, not about his pamphlet.

Plekhanov’s account, however, is corroborated by two letters written by Akselrod in the spring of 1902. In March Akselrod told Plekhanov that

as for Frei’s [Lenin’s] polemic with *Rabochee Delo* . . . I see that you were right. I read my own views into his words, but when reading the proofs I became convinced that you understood him better than me. Generally speaking Frei’s work in certain respects seems to me to have important defects and to be too extreme [*v svoem rode vabank*].⁶⁶

And at the end of May Akselrod wrote to I. O. Martov that “you are mistaken in attributing Plekhanov’s irritation entirely to the arguments in Munich concerning the [party] program.” The two had also argued about *What Is To Be Done?*, Akselrod explained. He went on to say that “regarding the latter, I was struck by how little attention was paid to our common criticisms. But I was inclined at that time not to blame him, for it would have been impossible for him to fully understand what we wanted from the tersely formulated summary of our debates.” Still, in a face-to-face encounter Plekhanov “again stated his obstinate desire for V. I. to consider the views of his comrades.” In conclusion Akselrod confided to Martov that he was amazed at “how little he [Lenin] considers the critical observations of close comrades.”⁶⁷

The evidence suggests, then, that Plekhanov and Akselrod *did* criticize Lenin’s pamphlet before publication. Plekhanov, as usual, communicated his dissatisfaction to Lenin bluntly. Akselrod, as usual, kept his criticism to himself in order not to exacerbate the already tense relations within the *Iskra* group. As Plekhanov informed Zasulich in a March 1902 letter, “when I was at your place I asked Pavel [Akselrod] to support me in my criticism of the pamphlet. He would not do it, but now he seems to regret it.”⁶⁸ Both were dismayed, however, that Lenin ignored their comments and published the manuscript with few changes.⁶⁹

But even if Lenin was right that he and Plekhanov had clashed only over the language of the party program and not his pamphlet, their differing formulations of one of the program’s clauses indicates that they did not agree about the capacities of the working class. In his first draft, written in January 1902, Plekhanov claimed that

as these inevitable contradictions of capitalism grow and develop, the dissatisfaction of the working class likewise grows . . . and in its midst the consciousness spreads ever wider and more quickly that only through its own efforts can it throw off the yoke of economic dependence.

In this formulation working-class consciousness develops spontaneously. But in his notes Lenin objected that “the spreading of consciousness” of the need for social revolution did *not* automatically accompany the “spontaneous growth of indignation” in the proletariat but “must be introduced by us.”⁷⁰ Plekhanov, it turned out, had failed to see that the class was not, and could not be, spontan-

ously revolutionary and socialist – a point Lenin insisted on vehemently at this time.⁷¹ In the end the language of the final draft reflected a compromise between Plekhanov's formulation and Lenin's, and it was sufficiently vague as to admit of various interpretations.

After Lenin published his pamphlet without revisions, Plekhanov decided that something had to be done to limit the damage *Iskra's* cause might suffer from Lenin's unorthodox assertions. Writing after his break with Lenin, Plekhanov claimed that in the winter of 1903 he penned "two articles for *Iskra* in which [he] purposely raised the question of the relation of the heroes to the crowd and resolved it in an entirely non-Leninist manner."⁷² Although he did not identify the two articles, one of them was clearly "The Ides of March," which appeared eight months before the split between Lenin and Plekhanov. In that article Plekhanov revisited the issue of spontaneity and consciousness and argued that "the ideas of scientific socialism do not contradict the spontaneous tendency of things and in general do not diverge from it but serve as its conscious expression"⁷³ This formulation was indeed at odds with the argument of *What Is To Be Done?*, but few probably recognized the veiled criticism it contained. It is also noteworthy that Plekhanov failed to defend Lenin's argument when it was publicly criticized by Riazanov in the spring of 1903. Riazanov devoted ten pages of a book on *Iskra's* draft program to Lenin's unorthodox assertions, but Plekhanov's rejoinder passed over those arguments in silence.⁷⁴

Plekhanov could not avoid saying something about *What Is To Be Done?*, however, when that work became a focal point of criticism at the Second Party Congress (July-August 1903). At the eighth session of the Congress, when the assembled delegates turned to debate *Iskra's* draft program for the party, A. S. Martynov (an *Iskra* opponent) spoke first and delivered a long, detailed critique of Lenin's argument in the second chapter of *What Is To Be Done?*. Not having been privy to the behind-the-scenes conflict between Lenin and Plekhanov over the party program, Martynov mistakenly believed that *Iskra's* draft had been decisively influenced by the unorthodox Lenin. He therefore sought to expose Lenin's unorthodoxy to the other delegates in order to convince them to rewrite the draft program before them. Martynov declared from the podium that

“Comrade Lenin sees a conflict between the ideology of the proletariat and its mission; I prefer to see a conflict between Lenin’s thesis and the one repeatedly expressed by Marx and Engels.” Martynov then proceeded to explain the orthodox teaching about working-class consciousness, quoting long passages from Marx’s works.⁷⁵

According to V. P. Akimov (another *Iskra* opponent), while Martynov spoke “the vast majority of delegates had even left the hall. The rest were busy with ‘their own affairs’. Only the Chairman, Plekhanov, listened to Martynov with demonstrative attention.”⁷⁶ Plekhanov must have felt somewhat uncomfortable. We know that he agreed with the gist of Martynov’s critique, but as an ally of Lenin it would have been damaging to admit this in public. When he responded to Martynov the following morning, however, Plekhanov found a way to disagree with his opponent without addressing the substance of his argument. Martynov claimed that the draft program reflected Lenin’s unorthodoxy. Plekhanov knew this was not so since he had fought bitterly with Lenin the previous year over the program, the published version of which was a compromise document. Plekhanov could therefore honestly tell the delegates that Martynov was wrong about the allegedly Leninist character of the draft program. Side-stepping Martynov’s argument, Plekhanov then declared that “Lenin did not write a tract on the philosophy of history but a polemical piece against the ‘economists,’ who said that we must wait until the working class itself advances, without help from the ‘revolutionary bacilli’.”⁷⁷ Plekhanov later recalled that “Comrade Martov understood [this] explanation as a gentle way of announcing my disagreement with Lenin as the author of the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*, and that was true.”⁷⁸ It was indeed a lame defense, for Lenin *had* made general, theoretical claims in the second chapter of his pamphlet. Plekhanov’s defense was opportunistic as well, for he sacrificed principle to political expediency in defending an argument he knew was flawed.

Martov was not the only member of the audience who detected a difference between Lenin and Plekhanov. After listening to Plekhanov’s speech, Akimov spoke next and declared that the claims of *What Is To Be Done?* were “completely inconsistent with what Plekhanov wrote in his commentaries [on the draft program]. I am convinced that Plekhanov does not agree with Lenin.”⁷⁹ Although

Iskra's supporters laughed at Akimov's assertion at the time, his observation was correct. In his commentary to the draft program, written shortly after the publication of Lenin's booklet, Plekhanov stated that the party "tries with all its might to *accelerate* the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat."⁸⁰ Akimov, who was no friend of Plekhanov, recognized that "this idea permeates all of Plekhanov's works, from the first to the latest," and he therefore concluded that there was a "profound disagreement" between Plekhanov and Lenin on this issue. "Anyone who says that Social Democracy accelerates the development of the proletariat's class consciousness obviously expresses an idea diametrically opposed to the idea of the man who finds it necessary to bring socialist consciousness to the proletariat 'from without'."⁸¹ Like Riazanov and Martynov, Akimov immediately saw that Lenin's claims were inconsistent with the Russian Social-Democratic orthodoxy, the chief spokesperson of which had been Plekhanov.

In short, even before Plekhanov broke with Lenin in late 1903, it was evident that the two did not agree about this particular issue. Although Plekhanov did influence Lenin's thinking in important ways,⁸² Lenin certainly did not derive his most famous argument about working-class consciousness from the father of Russian Marxism.

A RUSSIAN DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

According to Harding, "Lenin's views of the Party as presented in his writings from 1899 to 1902 are not to be regarded as extraordinary, innovatory, perverse, essentially Jacobin or unorthodox. On the contrary, they had long been canvassed in *Iskra* and accepted by Lenin's co-editors, who were the only ones who could be reasonably described as having a claim to expressing the orthodoxy of Russian Marxism."⁸³ I have demonstrated above that this interpretation is largely incorrect, at least with regard to the question of proletarian consciousness. Although it is true that Lenin's argument was not derived from Jacobin sources,⁸⁴ I believe that his views about working-class capacities were indeed extraordinary, innovatory, unorthodox and perverse. Never once in his writings had Plekhanov suggested that socialism must be brought from without to

the workers, and he immediately rejected the idea when he encountered it in Lenin's pamphlet. The argument was far too paternalistic for Plekhanov given his democratic sensibilities, and he feared what others might think of the Social Democrats if Lenin's views were mistaken for the party's orthodoxy.

There is a tendency in historical studies of Leninism to explain the anti-democratic elements of Lenin's thought in terms of the Russian context in which he acted. Lenin is said to have been decisively influenced by the Russian Jacobin tradition or Russian Social-Democratic theory, or by the repressive tsarist regime against which he fought. Perhaps certain facets of Lenin's thought can be explained in this way, but we should not overlook the possibility that Lenin might have broken with these traditions and invented something unprecedented. In the end Lenin's argument about spontaneity and consciousness in *What Is To Be Done?* was his own invention – influenced by German Social-Democratic theory, to be sure, but unique nonetheless.⁸⁵ The argument was certainly not the product of the Russian Social-Democratic tradition to which Lenin had been exposed in the 1890s, for that body of thought was in fact consistently democratic.⁸⁶ There *were* democratic traditions within Russian culture before the revolution, and Leninism took shape only as it broke with these democratic traditions.

NOTES

¹ V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 5th ed. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1958–1965), 6: 28–53. Hereafter cited as LPSS.

² To cite but one example, Leonard Schapiro argued that Lenin's "doctrines had little in common with the views developed by Plekhanov and Akselrod." See *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 40.

³ Samuel Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), chs. 7, 11–12. Baron's interpretation in turn influenced Leszek Kolakowski's. See *Main Currents of Marxism*, trans. P. Falla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 2:334–335.

⁴ Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977–1981), 1: 50, 143–144.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 189.

⁶ The following works repeat Harding's interpretation: David McLellan, *Marxism after Marx* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 86–88; David Lovell, *From Marx to Lenin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 93, 136, 139, 146–150; Paul LeBlanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Atlantic Heights: Humanities Press International, 1990), pp. 57, 60, 63; John Marot, "Alexander

Bogdanov, *Vpered*, and the Role of the Intellectual in the Workers' Movement," *Russian Review* 49 (July 1990): 254–257; and Moira Donald, *Marxism and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 25–30.

⁷ See Meyer's review of Harding's book in *American Political Science Review* 73 (December 1979): 1129. Likewise Andrzej Walicki has criticized Harding's book, yet he agrees that Plekhanov and Lenin were at one on this issue. See *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 241.

⁸ For a good discussion of Marx's view of working-class consciousness see Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977–1990), 2: chs. 2–3, 6. Plekhanov's theory was consistent with Marx's, I believe, but Marx was not the primary source of Plekhanov's doctrine.

⁹ Echoing a common sentiment, P. B. Akselrod claimed that Bakunin's book "made a powerful impression" on him in the middle 1870s as he began to engage in revolutionary activity. See *Perezhitoie i peredumannoe* (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1975), p. 114. On Bakunin's influence on Russian Populism see also Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, trans. F. Haskell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 429–445; Jan Meijer, *Knowledge and Revolution* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955), pp. 156–161; and Max Nettlau, "Bakunin und die russische revolutionäre Bewegung in den Jahren 1868–1873," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* 5 (1915): 357–422.

¹⁰ See "Pribavlenie A" of *Gosudarstvennost' i anarkhiia* in *Archives Bakounine*, ed. A. Lehning (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961–1981), 3: 164.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3: 168.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3: 113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3: 169–170. I have simplified Bakunin's theory somewhat. He did believe that there were regressive elements within the popular psyche, but this part of his theory is underemphasized in Russian Populist ideology.

¹⁴ On Plekhanov's Populist phase see Baron, *Plekhanov*, chs. 2–3.

¹⁵ Akselrod, *Perezhitoie i peredumannoe*, p. 206.

¹⁶ See Donald Senese, "Bakunin's Last Disciple: Sergei Kravchinskii," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 10 (Winter 1976): 570–576.

¹⁷ See the reproduction in *Revoliutsionnaia zhurnalistika semidesiatykh godov*, ed. V. Bogucharskii (Rostov: Donskaia Rech, 1905), p. 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72. Baron noted that "these passages were so close in spirit to Plekhanov's own thinking that he might have written them himself." See *Plekhanov*, p. 35.

²⁰ *Revoliutsionnaia zhurnalistika*, p. 237.

²¹ G. V. Plekhanov, "Predislovie k zapiskam d-ra Vasil'eva 'V semidesiatye godu'" in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1922–1927), 24: 128. Hereafter cited as PS. In "Predislovie k pervomu tomu pervogo izdaniia sobraniia sochinenii" (1905) Plekhanov also said that "the basic thought grounding my Populist views . . . was not so far from the basic idea of Marxism as might seem at first glance, and my present worldview represents nothing more than the logical development of the basic thought that captivated me even when I worked in the organs of revolutionary Populism." See PS 1: 19.

²² On the split within *Zemlia i Volia* see Deborah Hardy, *Land and Freedom* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

- ²³ “O sotsial’noi demokratii v Rossii” (1903) in PS 9: 19.
- ²⁴ On Plekhanov’s conversion to Marxism see Baron, *Plekhanov*, chs. 5–6.
- ²⁵ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 411.
- ²⁶ PS 2: 28.
- ²⁷ PS 2: 57–58.
- ²⁸ PS 2: 64–66.
- ²⁹ PS 2: 77–78.
- ³⁰ PS 2: 66. In Marxist theory the “subjective” precondition for revolution is the development of class consciousness.
- ³¹ PS 2: 83–85.
- ³² PS 2: 59–60.
- ³³ PS 3: 188.
- ³⁴ In an August 1904 article criticizing Lenin’s theory, Plekhanov explained that “if we, the former *chernoperedeltsy*, passed from Populism to Marxism, then we are obliged to a very great extent to ‘the spontaneous growth of the workers’ movement’.” “When I was a Populist and belonged to the *Zemlia i Volia* organization, I was chiefly ‘occupied with the workers’; I am convinced that precisely the experience I acquired in this ‘occupation’ prepared me to assimilate Marxism.” See “Rabochii klass i sotsial-demokraticheskaia intelligentsiia” in PS 13: 119.
- ³⁵ PS 2: 113, 337–338.
- ³⁶ PS 2: 123.
- ³⁷ PS 2: 150.
- ³⁸ PS 2: 132.
- ³⁹ PS 2: 336.
- ⁴⁰ PS 2: 338. Plekhanov was eager to hasten the development of class consciousness so that the workers could gain hegemony in the forthcoming bourgeois revolution and thereby win concessions that would facilitate the more distant socialist revolution.
- ⁴¹ PS 2: 361.
- ⁴² Jay Bergman, *Vera Zasulich: A Biography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), pp. 154, 119.
- ⁴³ See N. Riazanov, *Materialy dlia vyrabotki partiinoi programmy* (Geneva: Bor’ba, 1903), 2: 7–9.
- ⁴⁴ PS 3: 29–30.
- ⁴⁵ PS 3: 79–80.
- ⁴⁶ PS 11: 304; see also PS 11: 264–264; 8: 261, 305.
- ⁴⁷ *K voprosu o razvitiu monisticheskogo vzgliada na istoriiu* (1895) in PS 7: 249.
- ⁴⁸ Baron, *Plekhanov*, pp. 205, 207, 213–214, 243–244.
- ⁴⁹ Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 1: 144.
- ⁵⁰ On the “economist” controversy see Dietrich Geyer, *Lenin in der russischen Sozialdemokratie* (Colonge: Böhlau Verlag, 1963), pp. 80–186; J. L. H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 54–66; and Abraham Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), ch. 5.
- ⁵¹ S. N. Prokopovich, “Otvēt n broshiru Aksel’roda” (1898) in PS 12: 505–506. This is the most theoretically sophisticated “economist” document.
- ⁵² PS 12: 14.
- ⁵³ PS 12: 15.

⁵⁴ PS 12: 28, 30.

⁵⁵ PS 12: 26.

⁵⁶ See for example the arguments in “Nasha blizhaishaia zadacha” and “Popiatnoe napravlenie” in LPSS 4: 189, 244.

⁵⁷ Robert Mayer, “Lenin, Kautsky and Working-Class Consciousness,” *History of European Ideas* 18 (September 1994): 673–681.

⁵⁸ Karl Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm in seinem grundsätzlichen Theil erläutert* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1892), pp. 232–242.

⁵⁹ In his August 1904 article against Lenin, Plekhanov gently criticized the Kautsky passage cited in *What Is To Be Done?* as an inadequate formulation of the role of science in the workers’ movement. See PS 13: 126–130.

⁶⁰ Norman Levine, “The Germanization of Lenin,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 35 (January 1988): 1–37. Kautsky’s writings were the benchmark of orthodoxy within the German movement, but not everyone agreed with his statements about proletarian consciousness. See the exchange between Kautsky and Adler in *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Gesamtparteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei Oesterreichs* (Vienna: ASDAP, 1901), pp. 108, 124.

⁶¹ Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 1: 167.

⁶² See the 23 December 1901 letter to Akselrod in LPSS 46: 166.

⁶³ Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 1: 188–189. The latter sentence is a quotation from Schapiro, *Communist Party*, p. 40.

⁶⁴ PS 13: 135–137.

⁶⁵ See Lenin’s note to an article by V. V. Vorovskii in LPSS 9: 355.

⁶⁶ *Perepiska Plekhanova i Aksel’roda*, ed. P. A. Berlin, B. S. Voitinskii and B. I. Nicolaevskii (Moscow: Izdanie R. M. Plekhanovoi, 1925), 2: 165.

⁶⁷ *Sotsial-demokraticeskoe dvizhenie v Rossii: materialy*, ed. A. N. Potresov and B. I. Nicolaevskii (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928), p. 90.

⁶⁸ *Perepiska Plekhanova i Aksel’roda*, 2: 167.

⁶⁹ Lenin was informed about the anger of Plekhanov and Akselrod when they discovered that their criticisms of the pamphlet had been ignored in two April 1902 letters by Martov and a June 1902 letter by V. A. Noskov. See the documents in *Leninskii sbornik* 3 (1925): 400, 408; and *Leninskii sbornik* 4 (1925): 107–108.

⁷⁰ See the documents in LPSS 6: 198–199.

⁷¹ See Lenin’s sharp rebuke in April 1902 to the Northern League on this point in LPSS 6: 362.

⁷² PS 13: 137.

⁷³ PS 12: 339. The other article was probably “Znachenie rostovskoi stachki” (January 1903) in PS 12: 274–275.

⁷⁴ See Riazanov, *Materialy*, 2: 89–100; and Plekhanov, “‘Ortodoksal’noe’ bukvoedstvo” (June 1903) in PS 12: 371–410.

⁷⁵ *Vtoroi s’ezd RSDRP: protokoly* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1959), pp. 108–119.

⁷⁶ See Akimov’s account in *Vladimir Akimov and the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism 1895–1903*, ed. J. Frankel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 154.

⁷⁷ *Vtoroi s’ezd*, p. 125. See also the comments in PS 13: 137–138.

⁷⁸ PS 13: 137–138.

⁷⁹ *Vtoroi s’ezd*, p. 126.

⁸⁰ “Kommentarii k projektu programmy RSDRP” (August 1902) in PS 12: 228 (Plekhanov’s emphasis).

⁸¹ *Dilemmas of Russian Marxism*, pp. 120, 123.

⁸² I agree with Jonathan Frankel that intolerance of differing points of view and scepticism about the benefits of freedom of criticism within the party was “one of Plekhanov’s gifts to Lenin.” See his “Introduction” to *Dilemmas of Russian Marxism*, p. 32.

⁸³ Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 1: 187.

⁸⁴ For a convincing critique of the Jacobin interpretation see Neil Harding, “Lenin’s Early Writings: The Problem of Context,” *Political Studies* 23 (December 1975): 442–458.

⁸⁵ On the differences between Lenin’s argument and Kautsky’s see Mayer, “Lenin, Kautsky and Working-Class Consciousness”; and John Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky: Marxism, Revolution and Democracy* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994), ch. 2.

⁸⁶ For a related argument on the differences between Plekhanov and Lenin see Robert Mayer, “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat from Plekhanov to Lenin,” *Studies in East European Thought* 45 (December 1993): 255–280.

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